



January 31, 2007

Bi-weekly Newsletter

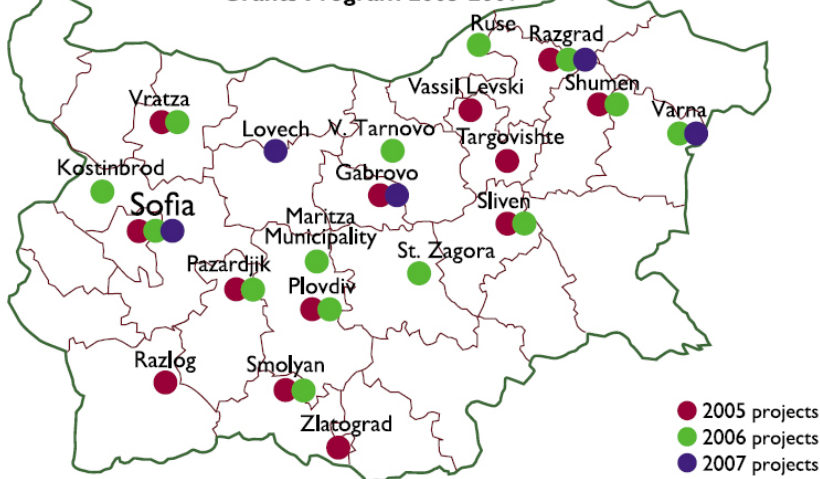
USAID AWARDS FINAL COMPETITIVE GRANTS TO SUPPORT THE WORK OF THE COURTS

The USAID Judicial Strengthening Initiative (JSI) awarded grants to fifteen rule of law NGOs on January 19, in the final cycle of the JSI Competitive Grants Program. The program supports collaborative efforts between Bulgarian courts and civil society groups to increase the transparency, efficiency, and accountability of the judicial system. Begun in 2005, JSI grants competitions have dispersed nearly \$1.5 million through a rigorous selection process based on proposal quality, innovation, and the likelihood of practical outcomes. The JSI Competitive Grants Program is the expansion of an earlier program offering grants to NGOs working with courts – started in 2004 under the USAID Judicial Development Project.

This third cycle of JSI competitive grants includes a variety of areas of work to strengthen the rule of law. The winning NGO proposals include Court Watch programs, the training of magistrates, development of television and radio documentaries on the judiciary, and projects with high school students to raise awareness about the work of the courts. Some grantees focused on training in important rule of law areas such as trafficking in persons and the handling of classified information. USAID Democracy and Local Governance Chief Gene Gibson addressed the fifteen grantees, explaining the wider importance of a more open court system: “As a consequence of enhanced transparency, the public will come to have a better understanding and appreciation for the critical work the judiciary performs.” ❖



Community Partners of Judicial Strengthening Initiative Grants Program 2005-2007





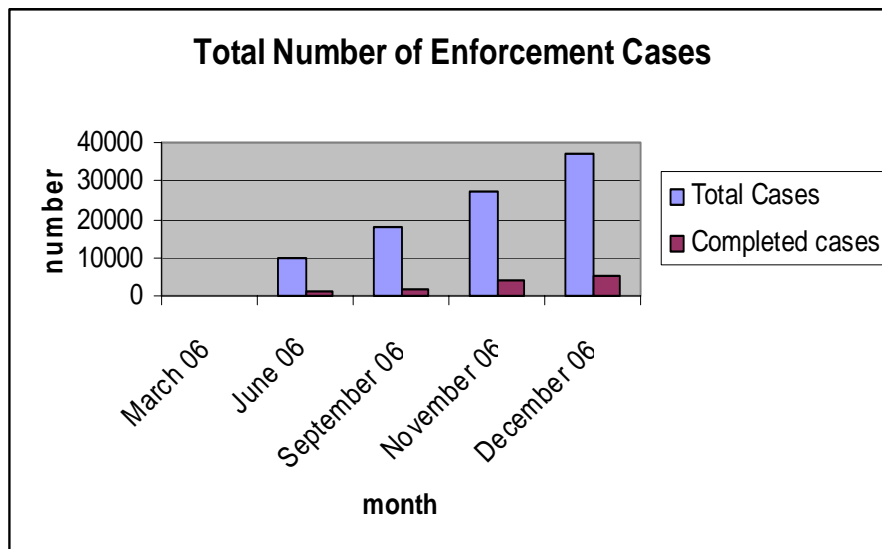
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CHAMBER OF PRIVATE ENFORCEMENT AGENTS REPORTS IMPRESSIVE RESULTS

The USAID-supported Chamber of Private Enforcement Agents held its first regular General Assembly on January 27 in Plovdiv.

Chamber management presented its first Annual Report to the 168 member agents and described its accomplishments during the first year of its existence. The Chamber succeeded in establishing itself and adopting key organizational accountability documents, as well as in building the prestige of this new profession and winning the public trust. Reported results are more than impressive (*see table*).



The first private enforcement agents assumed office in April. By the end of December 2006 private enforcement agents had a total of 37,286 enforcement cases with owed payments exceeding 339 million BGN. They successfully closed 5,500 enforcement cases and collected more than 89 million BGN. The average success rate was 27 percent.

To continue this positive trend, private enforcement agents need to develop and maintain the highest standards of professional and ethical conduct and prove that they serve the public interest. The Chamber voted for a 2007 budget and identified its priorities for next year. These include strictly imposing the standards and working for the development of uniform professional practices.

USAID has invested significant resources in the reform of judgment enforcement. Through its Commercial Law Reform Program (CLRP), USAID assists the Ministry of Justice and the Chamber of Private Enforcement Agents is assisting to develop a unified performance monitoring IT system, which will be launched at the beginning of April. USAID will continue supporting Chamber's efforts in establishing a professional and sustainable organization through September 2007.



The Chamber's Chairman Georgi Dichev told the General Assembly: "All these achievements would not have been possible without USAID's support and the dedication of CLRP's team."❖

Left to right: G. Dichev, Chairman of the Chamber of Private Enforcement Agents, Adrian Stoika - Romanian Chamber of Enforcement Agents, T. Lukov - PEA, Bernanrd Menut - Member of the Board of the International Union of Enforcement Agents, and Chris Thompson - Chief of Party, USAID CLRP at the opening of the General Assembly.